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# SHOULD THE U FIGHT SECRET W

Almost from the first "contra" was issued his A made combat boots, the Reagan Adminis secret war against Nicaragua has been embro vociferous if somewhat bizarre public deba gressmen proclaim their outrage, editorialist their misgivings, while officials in Washingto are running the war—blandly "decline to c on intelligence matters."

Secret, or covert, wars are an honored tra postwar U.S. foreign policy, having enjoye thing of a golden age in the 1950s, when discreetly shuffled governments in Iran, Gu and the Philippines. But the "controversial secret war" is a paradox peculiar to our post-Vietnam, post-Watergate democracy. At the root of the furor over Nicaragua lies a conflict that has obsessed America's public life for the last fifteen-odd years: the people's right to know versus the stated demands of national security.

Can any democracy effectively fight secret wars? Should the United States fight such wars? If so, by what moral right and in what circumstances? To consider these dilemmas, *Harper's* recently brought together intelligence officers, politicians, and diplomats who have confronted them firsthand and found them no less easy to resolve.

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